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Dear Brother:

This is not a good time to add still one more letter to your Christmas mail. It has a good chance of landing in the basket with all the pretty Christmas cards and to remain there until mother cleans up about Epiphany. If, however, you have a few moments to read it, perhaps over the breakfast coffee and before you turn to matters that require intellectual effort and spiritual strength, I shall be grateful.

* * *

Christmas, Good Friday and Easter are undoubtedly the most challenging (and the most wearying) days in the life of the contemporary herald of the King of Kings. The number of services increases abruptly (there will be between 25,000 and 30,000 in the Missouri Synod alone between December 23 and 25 this year), the gray sheep on the edges of your flock suddenly show up for a nostalgic look at the faith of their childhood, and the preacher finds himself face to face with the staggering task of breaking through the walls of spiritual ice and material comfort with the story of the Incarnation, the Child in the cave under the floor of the world and the sudden unveiling of the secret counsels of God, breaking brilliantly over our smallness and weakness and darkness. This is a task beyond all others — a task for men who themselves, personally and surely, have stooped under the small door at Bethlehem and stood, personally and surely, under the sound of the choirs of heaven. This is the day and the hour when it is our task to open the gates and hold the King of Glory high in our hands for all our people to see and to adore. The "Venite Adoremus Dominum" is in a special sense the song and the burden of the preacher. I hope that God will give you strength and grace to say it humbly and faithfully.

* * *

Now at Christmas time I seem to feel more than at any other season the incomparable charm of the American small town and the country. Of course, I know that there are advantages in a big city parish . . . the great choirs and rolling organs on Christmas Eve . . . the crowds of lonely, lost people to whom my brother in the big city will have to preach with a tone of finality and authority if he wants to see them again before Good Friday. But my town and my farmers from the country bring very real compensations. At this season far more often than usual I wander downtown with Stephen (age four) for shopping which has to be done privately without the normal cooperation of the more intelligent part of the family. We meander down Main Street at dusk with the sun red and gold over the valley, each immersed in his own thoughts. What Stephen is thinking, I can gather only from occasional remarks delivered sotto voce from the hood of his snowsuit: "Look at that truck." "There's a new gun." "Does that train really work?" My own thoughts range over the vanished years . . . the first Christmas in Perry County for a boy from the sidewalks of New York translated suddenly into a startlingly different world . . . children playing in German or a reasonable facsimile of it . . . Grandfather Hueschen telling me how he could discern the spiritual state of his deacons by the quality of the wood they brought him: "Vorsteher Schlucksbier bringt immer faules Holz." Then there were the services on the first, second and third Christmas Day. There was also the old wood stove in our bedroom to which an obliging aunt brought kindling before my seminary roommate and I even dared to crawl out of the bed. There were the services at Uniontown or Friedheim or Frohna on the afternoon of second Christmas Day in which I was allowed to preach and never once woke up a single deacon who was slumbering peacefully, stuffed with goose and turkey and good will to men. There is something ironic in the picture of our seminary students trying out their immature theology in a place where, at that moment, it matters very little. I remember those days poignantly — and many other things — as I walk down Main Street this blessed season which no frantic buying and selling can make less solemn and less holy. One out of five faces along the street I recognize. One out of ten I know by his first name and vice versa. It is a good and gracious experience to be able to walk into the bank and wave to the president: "Hi ya, Reg," or wander into the drugstore and be greeted with, "Where have you been lately?" Stephen trudges along quietly, his boots clumping on the sidewalk and his eyes bemused by so much tinselled glory in the windows. It is a good way to close a year of conventions and meetings, ecclesiastical tensions and academic problems. The years drop away, and I come a little closer to the manger, the Child, the angels, and the quiet touch of heaven, when I shall know and be known . . .

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Collection Section — An imaginary conversation: As you know, the Board of Directors has again designated the last Sunday in January as Valpo Sunday.

Voice from the traditional brother in the rear: "This is the part I can skip."

I: "Please don't. I have to justify the time devoted to these ramblings before the intelligent, searching eyes of my own deacons — the Board of Trustees of the University."

Brother in the rear: "I know. We got you in the budget for twenty-five bucks."

I: "Would you please look again and see if you can raise the ante? Everything is going up — the Missouri Synod, the University, living costs, the cost of equipment, and so forth. About one-third of our income comes from our congregations. We need more money, and we shall spend it gratefully and carefully. Our loyal instructors are still underpaid. Many of our students need help. With very little help from all our congregations we can do a real job which will pay long and rich dividends in the years to come."

Brother in the rear: "Where do I come in?"

I: "We know that, humanly speaking, the success of any offering depends on the attitude of the pastor. A warm word of commendation from you, some notes in your Sunday bulletin, a brief announcement in the meetings of your organization will help tremendously. With your cooperation, the annual congregational collection is the easiest and cheapest way for us to raise the funds we need to build the University our Church deserves. It is a choice between life and service and growth on the one hand, or weakness and attrition and decay on the other. I hope that you will stand by — this year more than ever before."

Brother in the rear: "I'll see what I can do."

I: "I am sure that our Lord will bless you in this additional effort for the long purposes and progress of the Kingdom."

P.S. Please read President Behnken's letter to your flock. It tells our story eloquently and accurately.

* * *

University notes: It seems to at least one observer that the Missouri Synod grapevine, always a fearful and mysterious apparatus, has been working overtime during the past few months. For example, I recently noted the case of a brother who had been injured in an automobile accident. When the news got to Valparaiso, he had one broken leg. When it got to Chicago, both legs were broken. When the grapevine reached Milwaukee, he had two broken legs and a fractured skull. When the story got to St. Louis, he was dead. In this kind of thing there is some strange forgetfulness of the imperatives of the Eighth Commandment. Perhaps it is not too serious in this particular case, but I am sure that when the brother wants another call, someone will suddenly remember this accident and point out that it hit him in the head and that ever since he has been a Crypto-Calvinist with overtones of semi-pelagianism. He just can't help it. Result: no call.

* * *

All this by way of introduction to the fact that I have recently run into some strange grapevine rumors concerning the religious program of the University. At a pastoral conference in the Middle West the brethren were kind enough to dig these rumors from under the stones and present them to me. Since all of us are exposed to the vagaries and dangers of the grapevine, I should perhaps say a few words about the religious activities of the University. Essentially they fall into three parts. There are, first of all, the formal courses in religion. Eight credits are required of every graduate of the University. One of the most interesting developments during the past few years has been that many students take additional credits beyond the required eight. The second part of our religious program is our daily chapel. I believe, almost uniquely in American higher education and among liberal arts colleges, we emphasize the religious nature of the daily meetings of the University family. The third part of our religious program is more informal. It is a permeating, dominating atmosphere which is partly the reflection of the homes from which our students come. About a month ago I met someone who was closely associated with one of our fraternities about which I had had some suspicions. He informed me that he had just recently attended several sessions lasting far into the night in which this particular group had discussed religious problems. I am aware of the fact, of course, that this also happens on secular campuses, but I am also sure that nowhere else do so many come up with the right answers. It is a very important factor in the religious education of our students.

* * *

In our formal program of religious training it is of course evident that there are very real problems. In the first place, religion is probably the most difficult subject in the world to teach. Not only must the necessary information be conveyed but every effort must be made to translate this factual information into attitudes, the training of the conscience, and the development of the progress of sanctification. For example, there is no religious value in knowing the distance from Jerusalem to Bethlehem or the height of Mount Nebo. Only when historical or geographical facts are woven into the mystery and miracle of the Incarnation and the plans of God for the world can such information become religious in any sense of the word.

* * *

Perhaps I should also admit very frankly that as everywhere else our work is spotty. Some men are just better teachers than others. At times even a good teacher is weary or finds himself in a class where things go wrong. I need only cite my own experience. There are some hours in my class in Christian Ethics in which I am very glad that none of the brethren are sitting in. Somehow or other things just do not go right. By and large, however, I believe that our formal work, both in the classes in religion and in our daily chapel exercises, is of a remarkably high order. Under the blessing of God the weak spots will

be eliminated as time goes on, but I can assure my dubious brother that the emphasis of the University on its religious instruction is honest, continuous and strong. If the grapevine should ever bring you any question on this part of our program, I hope you will feel free to write to me.

* * *

Correspondence section: An admirable number of brethren have again reached for their typewriters in order to present some observations — caustic and brotherly — on some of the things that were said in the last issue of these notes. Some of the remarks reminded me of the fact that one of these days I wanted to say more about the curious and mysterious relationship between faith and humor. Perhaps I can begin this project by quoting a letter from one of our brethren who is engaged in social welfare work and has done considerable research in this field. He writes:

"Many years ago I heard an address by Dr. William S. Sanders, Sr., whom you may know as an outstanding psychiatrist, in which he was speaking about a well-balanced personality. He stated that the various activities of our life offset and balance one another, and then he went on to bracket work and play, social life and sexual life, and religion and humor. He stated that without humor, religiousness can easily become fanaticism. He went on to say that the Congregational Church for many years had him give a psychiatric screening to their candidates for foreign mission work. One of his techniques in the course of an interview was to tell a number of the funniest stories he knew. If a candidate did not respond to at least one story, he would cancel him out. He related that in one case a man was accepted despite his recommendation that he be turned down, and within two years he cracked up in the field." An interesting sidelight on a problem which I thought was almost entirely theoretical.

* * *

Another brief note on a postcard:

"My reaction has three angles, small angles. I join you in the 'jaundiced look' (at informational prayers). Two: Reserving just a wee doubt about 'the great Collects'. Three: Suggesting annual family-life workshops or family retreats a la your third last paragraph. This is what you asked for — sort of a drought-stricken crop."

Several brethren responded vigorously to the remarks concerning "Informational Prayers". From the Pacific Northwest comes the following:

"And then there is the one about the college dean who forgot to make the announcement he intended to make and took care of it in his prayer, as follows:

'Omniscient God from Whom nothing is hid, we give Thee hearty thanks for all branches of learning, for the ability to learn various tongues and especially for French A-2 which as Thou knowest does not meet at the regular time tomorrow' . . . and so forth . . . I like that one.

A brother in Michigan:

"My teen-age daughters and I just had a time with the last Campus Commentary. They were particularly interested in the part about the 'Informational Prayers'. One of them remembered having read a book in which the parishioners found it unnecessary to subscribe to a newspaper since all they had to do was to listen to Deacon So-and-So's prayers, and they were all hep to the latest news."—

Another one from Illinois:

"I am glad that you believe that either the Lord reads the **Lutheran Witness** or otherwise knows what is going on, and that there is no need for these 'Informational Prayers'. It is pathetic when you take some of these prayers — I refer also to some in our devotional literature — and notice that there are many words and very little prayer. This is a sad experience. How beautiful the Collects are by comparison."

* * *

In the second last round of these ramblings I had referred to simplicity in language and the danger of gobbledy-gook, particularly in educational circles. Comes a letter from a learned brother who is teaching at a liberal arts college:

"I want to mention to you the strong and delightful essay of George Orwell's 'Politics and the English Language.' Some rare examples are there embalmed and dissected. It is in his collection of essays. Another very amusing recent study of the same theme — though not so deadly — is in Clifton Fadiman's Party of One: 'Plain Thoughts on Fancy Language.' His sections on the 'enfeebling intensifier' and 'sheep-talk' are particularly good. Orwell translates a fine passage in Ecclesiastes into modern gobbledy-gook."

A brother in Iowa reaches for a sheet of paper and sends in a few more quotes:

"The safest place on a teeter-totter is in the middle."

"Some minds are like concrete: all mixed up but permanently set."

Both quotations seem to me to have some ecclesiastical implications.

A final note from an older brother in Canada who refers to the "hot Synod" at Fort Wayne in 1923. He states that he "admired the patience and endurance of The Rev. H. H. Walker in the front seat in keeping his Prince Albert coat buttoned all the way up to his chin." He also notes that his roommate in 1923 was known only as an able speaker from Houston, Texas. He now happens to be the president of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod since 1935. An interesting historical footnote.

And now — a sudden change in mood and tempo — imposed upon me by the mysterious providence of God. I had just written that last paragraph and was tired. It was 11:30 p.m. An hour earlier I had returned from class. I retired but was unable to sleep. I seemed to detect smoke in the house. Wearily, I went over to the window and sniffed. Clearly, there was smoke coming from somewhere in the neighborhood — probably a pile of leaves burning late. I returned to bed and was just reaching for the light when the telephone at the bedside rang. An excited voice said: "The auditorium is on fire!" Before I could say anything, the telephone went dead. I dressed in two minutes flat (curiously remembering the Sem days when such hurried dressing for the eight o'clock class was an important part of our training), pulled on my boots, drove the wrong way down a one-way street, and ran the rest of the way to the auditorium. The local fire department was dragging hoses through the snow. One was already at work pouring water into a blazing classroom at the rear of the building. Even then the smoke was incredibly heavy and choking. I watched as more hoses went to work. At the end of a long hour it was clear that the building was doomed. The flames broke through the floor of the chapel, and the curtains on the stage and along the south wall blazed like tinder. In twenty minutes the whole chapel was a flaming inferno.

A hurried consultation with the Fire Chief . . . we turned our attention to the library, twenty feet from the north wall of the auditorium. Our students dragged the hoses over there, and protecting streams of water hit the roof and walls of the library. But the heat became almost unbearable. Another quick conference . . . we agreed on an evacuation of the library. You will understand that the loss of the library would cripple the school for decades. Many books are almost irreplaceable. The library building is even older and possibly drier than the chapel-auditorium.

The time was 1:45 a.m. Within a few minutes five hundred students had formed lines to pass books from hand to hand and deposit them helter-skelter in the basement of the arts-law building — 200 feet to the north. After another hour we stopped momentarily because the flames in the auditorium were burning themselves out. The height of the danger seemed to be past. Most of us stayed and watched until about 5:00 a.m., looking at the dying flames, each with his own thoughts of the proud history of the chapel-auditorium — the baccalaureate services and the commencement exercises during the war years, the plays and concerts, the anniversaries of faculty members, the occasional funerals, the chapel service on December 8, 1941, the annual Reformation convocation, the Christmas concert and the Christmas vespers — all the memories of the long years during which this building had been the living heart of a living institution. I must confess that when I finally turned away there were some tears in my eyes — not caused by the smoke. Brick and mortar and stone may not be important in themselves, but as a symbol of life and strength and faith they can become memorable and very dear to the remembering heart. I walked down the street to attend the meeting of students who were already organizing a clean-up campaign and a special appeal to our friends for help.

As this is written, a big steel ball is battering against the standing walls, stark against the sky, to eliminate the danger of their falling. The building is a total loss.

Losses: all the equipment of the office of the Business Manager and the Registrar — files, typewriters, current records, machines. The personal libraries of two of our professors. Three major classrooms. Everything in the chapel — altar, chancel furniture, hymnals, lights, communion ware, choir robes, clergy vestments.

Blessings: No one was hurt seriously. Two students sustained minor injuries. The sudden revelation of the spirit, devotion and intelligence of our student body. Humanly speaking, they saved the library. They stood in icy water for hours holding hoses. They climbed on roofs to extinguish flying sparks with towels and their two feet. They organized the "book line". Their work was a magnificent demonstration of what we call "the Valpo spirit" — a very real and a very good thing.

Problems: We must now proceed immediately with the construction of an administration-classroom building, at least of the first unit. Insurance will bring us about \$300,000. We shall need at least \$300,000 more for the first unit. During the past forty-eight hours offers of help have flowed in from all parts of the country. Our students are writing to their friends asking for special assistance.

And so, good brother, my appeal for your help in the congregational collection now has suddenly become much more urgent. We are really in immediate and desperate need. Please let me make one thing very clear: While the funds from our congregational collection are marked for current operations, any appreciable increase will enable the Board of Trustees to use the additional funds for our new building. I have just conferred with President Behnken, and he suggested that we emphasize this fact in our appeal to you. A marked increase in our annual offerings on the last Sunday in January will certainly help us through this crisis.

* * *

And so—we shall still have a good Christmas. The students are now decorating the gymnasium for chapel services, the Christmas concert and the final vesper. Fortunately, the carols for the Child can be sung anywhere.

May you also find joy in the proclaiming of the glory and mercy of God on the birthday of His only begotten Son who came for our salvation and now knows, every day and every hour, what is best for His children.

Very sincerely yours,

O. P. Kretzmann, President